



# THE WAPSIPINICON

A newsletter published quarterly by the

## TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

\* 2010 Volunteer Institution of the Year, Illinois Association of Museums

\*2020 Project Winner of Illinois Governor's Hometown Award,  
representing the Volunteers of the Tiskilwa Community

VOLUME 16

SEPTEMBER 2021

NUMBER 3

### MUSEUM ON MAIN

AND

### GALLERY ON GALENA

Our collection includes more than 10,000 artifacts, displayed to preserve and interpret local history.

The **MoM** is housed in an 1855 Illinois Historic Landmark Building at 110 East Main Street.

The **GoG** is in the former Legion Hall, 550 North Galena, just south of the tracks.

### MUSEUM HOURS:

SATURDAYS: 9 TO 2

### GALLERY HOURS:

FIRST SATURDAYS: 10-1

**Admission is free,  
and our volunteers  
will show you around.**  
For private tours,  
call Ed Waca  
at 815.646.4016.

### Board of Directors 2020-2021

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## FALL PROGRAMS TO FOCUS ON ILLINOIS HISTORY

Well, well. THAT was an unusual summer for our society! After quietly celebrating our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary and 2020 Governor's Hometown Award, we're looking ahead to an exciting fall line-up of programs. If the health of our fellow Illinoisans holds steady, we'll resume our tradition of presenting monthly programs in our Community Room in the upper level of Museum on Main. However, as you'll read below, the first program will be outdoors on a Sunday afternoon, instead of indoors on the traditional second Monday evening. It will also serve as our Annual Meeting, giving us an opportunity to thank outgoing board members, elect new ones, and present a very brief summary of our financial report, as explained in an article on page 2.

**SUNDAY, September 5, 3:00 p.m. WEST LAWN:** "Mussels, Moonshine, and Music: Migrant Workers in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century along the Mississippi" How's that for a title to catch your attention? Using artifacts, photos, oral histories, and toe-tapping fiddle music, the nationally recognized musician and historian **Dennis Stroughmatt** will guide us on an exciting voyage of discovery. He'll introduce us to the lives of river-based folks who worked all across Illinois more than 100 years ago. A little-known fact is that the Midwest and upper South were once home to thousands of migrant families who lived and worked on rivers as sharecroppers, fishermen, mussel shellers, button cutters, traveling minstrels, and, yes, even moonshiners! Their work was hard, but they played hard too, reveling in the lively music they heard in Memphis and St. Louis. Dennis holds a master's degree in history from SIU-Carbondale and a Certificate of French Quebecois Studies in Quebec. He is not only a musician but a passionate educator who entertains as he teaches. A Road Scholar, Dennis's performance is made possible through the **Illinois Humanities Council** who underwrites his program.



**MONDAY, October 11, 7:00 p.m.** Our October speaker, **Tiffany White**, serves as the Executive Director of the **Dirksen Congressional Center**, located in Everett McKinley Dirksen's hometown of Pekin, Illinois. Everett Dirksen served in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate for nearly four decades, and he was the Senate's Republican Minority Leader from 1959 until his death in 1969. He is best known for his indispensable role in ushering into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Center is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization with a mission to enhance the public's understanding of Congress, its people, and its policies. Tiffany, a 2008 graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has served in numerous government-related posts before being tapped to lead the Dirksen Center in 2019. She notes that her approach to life is dedicated to Teddy Roosevelt's famous saying that the best prize life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.



**MONDAY, November 8, 7:00 p.m.** Come to the Museum on Main and imagine yourself sitting at a campfire with **Black Hawk**, listening to the stories of creation and the legends of his grandfathers. Storyteller and historian **Brian "Fox" Ellis** will share his own family's Cherokee Nation history as well as his deep knowledge of Native American history. He'll take us on a journey back into history with both humor and insight, leading us through time to an encounter with Black Hawk's Band on the eve of battle. Weaving fact with folklore, Brian draws his audience into the world view of this respected leader of his people. Traditional chants, drumming songs, and social dances will celebrate the First Nations of Illinois and offer a world view through Native eyes. Brian is a Road Scholar, whose appearance is supported by the **Illinois Humanities Council**.



## TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Thank you to those listed here who recently joined or renewed!**  
**We're finishing 2021 with a total of 321 members and sponsors.**  
 (Members are from Tiskilwa unless otherwise noted.)

### NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS

#### ◆ INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES ◆

Ted Bachman (DeKalb)  
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 Sandra Chiaravalle (Hopewell)  
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 Susan Thompson Leussler (Weldon Spring, MO)  
 Teri Miller (Columbus, IN)  
 Marilyn Olds (Wyanet)  
 Wanda Rahn (Geneseo)  
 Eleanor Sapp (Princeton)  
 Cletus & Nancy Sims

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Linda Ioder Dodge (Alva, FL)  
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#### ◆ SILVER BENEFACTOR ◆

Charlotte Pettegrew Golinvaux (Wayzata, MN)

#### ◆ PLATINUM BENEFACTOR ◆

Lee Helle (Northport, WA)

**REMINDERS:** If you are retired from or employed by a company with a **MATCHING GIFTS** Program, we'll cheerfully complete the paperwork!

On August 7, friends with "Classic Rides" joined in the fun and offered a good look at more than 15 vintage vehicles on the west lawn.



In the distance by our announcement sign, please note the brand new American flag, waving proudly in the breeze. We thank **Rich and Cheryl Barnett** for purchasing and installing this gift to our society.

### IN MEMORIAM

Thank you for memorials received since our June newsletter.

**ED & HELEN PETTEGREW**  
**DEKO MILLER**  
**KEITH MILLER**  
**ANNA FISHER MEYER**  
**PHYLLIS SIMS**

## Financial Summary: 2020-21 Fiscal Year

The financial support from you, our members, and the Tiskilwa community has been most generous this past pandemic year, ending June 30, 2021. During this time, the former Legion Hall building has been transformed into Gallery on Galena – debt-free and completed with Building Fund money only and by dedicated volunteers. An audited financial report will soon be available for members to review upon request. Thank you to all who have contributed their time, talent and resources. Submitted by Judy Wright, Treasurer

## THS Alumni Crowd of 144 Packs Picnic in the Park

Lots of smiling and visiting brightened the picnic shelter in the West Park on Saturday, August 7 – from the opening grace to the final "Cha he, cha ha, cha ha ha ha!" Because of COVID uncertainties during planning, this year's **THS Alumni Committee** worked with **Tiskilwa Community Association** to host a picnic supper in the park shelter. Despite the heat, numerous alums commented that they like this outdoor arrangement better than the traditional indoor banquet.

Attendees gave a resounding round of applause to this year's planning committee: **Sondra Owens** (THS '84), **Suzanne Ary** (THS '84), **Christy Wagner Senneff** (THS '81), **Nancy Senneff Ketay** (THS '90), **Randy Senneff** (THS '73), and **Cecille Gerber** (THS '63).

Keynote speakers **Nyla Bell Pinter** (THS '71) and **Richard Borge** (THS '70) shared touching and humorous memories of our hometown during their school years. In recognizing the anniversary classes for both 2020 and 2021, Randy and Cele asked people to name the number-one pop song from their graduation year. Admittedly, most classes whiffed completely, even when given clues. However, when 1971's top hit "Joy to the World" by Three Dog Night was mentioned, the entire assembly burst into a rendition, on-key enough to warm the heart of longtime choral director **Doris Hamilton**.



**Left:** Lookin' great for old times, **Sharon Sissel Anderson** (THS '61), and THS '60 grads **Kay Wilson Covey**, **Jerry Pearson**, and **Dixie Nye Baldwin** smiled for the camera. **Right:** Reunion participants enjoyed pulled pork sandwiches with all the fixin's plus dessert, catered by **Alexander Park Tavern**, Princeton.

A little history lesson and a heartfelt request: The first THS class graduated in 1878 and the **Tiskilwa High School Alumni Association** was formed the following year. C'mon, let's not allow our crowd-pleasing alumni gathering to become history! Could **you** volunteer to be part of a rotating committee that can make it continue to happen? The Picnic in the Park may be the way to go for future THS Alumni gatherings. What do you think? If you can help with planning, please get in touch with anyone on the 2021 committee.

### TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Annual dues: Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

**MEMBERSHIP:** Individual \$15; Family \$20

**SPONSORSHIP** (includes membership dues)

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Please make check payable to Tiskilwa Historical Society  
and mail it to P.O. Box 87, Tiskilwa, IL 61368. THANK YOU!



*Editor's note: This feature is reprinted from our September 2010 issue. For more details, visit the Museum on Main's Timeline Gallery.*

## **TISKILWA'S LINK TO LINCOLN by Cecille Gerber**

It's a Norman Rockwell image: On a dusty summer's day in 1856, an out-of-town lawyer folds his lanky form into a rocking chair on the porch of **Hotel Utopia** in **Tiskilwa**. He settles in next to a scrubbed and polished eighteen-year-old, a young fellow eager for any news or a few stories from someone beyond the borders of his tiny community.

Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction, and we local history detectives have pieced together a crazy quilt of evidence pointing to the probability of an overnight stay by the future 16th President of the United States, **Abraham Lincoln**, in our little village of Tiskilwa, Illinois.

The most recent clue for the Tiskilwa Historical Society's "Link to Lincoln" theory surfaced a few months ago when nonagenarian **Mary Lou Breene** of Oil City, Pennsylvania, visited the Museum on Main. The young man (mentioned above) on the hotel porch with Lincoln was her great-uncle, **Andrew Swanzy**, son of **Dr. James Swanzy**, one of the founding fathers of Tiskilwa, an immigrant from Ireland in 1836. By the time her Uncle Andrew died in 1928 at age 90, nine-year-old Mary Lou had heard the story many times about Andrew's visit with Abe Lincoln on that July day in 1856.

As a matter of fact, we've turned up several accounts to back up Mary Lou's family's modest claim to fame.

Back in 2006, we took our first tentative steps on the trail of Lincoln's visit when we were reprinting **Mary B. Steimle's** 1985 booklet, *When Tiskilwa Was Young*. We noticed this entry: "Did you know . . . it is said that Lincoln spoke to a group of Tiskilwa residents in the East Park during one of his campaign trips, long before he was President?" (p. 25) The story, as told to Mary by lifelong Tiskilwa resident, **Margaret Welsh** (1863-1942), is that Margaret's mother remembered when Lincoln shushed a group of talkative women in the East Park with the wry observation that they sounded "like a gaggle of geese." Sounds like something Abe would say!

This started us thinking: It's well documented that, on July 4, 1856, Lincoln was one of several speakers at an anti-slavery rally in Princeton's **Bryant's Grove**. The purpose was to drum up support for the newly formed Republican Party as well as to criticize the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** of 1854, authored by **Stephen Douglas**.

After we shared the "gaggle of geese" anecdote, **Pam Lange**, director of the Bureau County Historical Society Museum, shared a copy of a 1929 newspaper clipping stating that "Mr. Lincoln was driven to Princeton [for the July 4<sup>th</sup> rally] from Tiskilwa by **Orin Wilkinson** who then resided at Tiskilwa, Illinois." This information emerged as part of an affidavit by 92-year-old **S. P. Clark**, notarized in 1929, to affirm that a photo of Abraham Lincoln (*at right*) was indeed taken at the **Masters Studio** in Princeton at the conclusion of the Fourth of July speeches in Bryant's Grove. (*Bureau County Republican*, August 8, 1929)

Hmmm. We then speculated that perhaps Lincoln took the **C.R.I.&P. (Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific) Railway** to Tiskilwa, stayed overnight at Hotel Utopia, and hired the services of the hack driver, Mr. Wilkinson, to take him to Princeton the next day.

Along the way in our investigations, we confirmed that the railroad first came through Tiskilwa in 1853 and that **Hotel Utopia**, on the southwest corner adjacent to the tracks, was constructed that same year. Also called **The Tiskilwa House** at one point, it was a big hotel for a little town, with "150 feet of porches around the inside of its 'L' form, 100 windows, 75 doors, 42 rooms all told, and 34 beds." (Steimle, *WTWY*, p. 38) The hotel burned to the ground in

1922, with all records destroyed in that fire. However, our Museum on Main boasts a rocking chair from that old hotel, given to us by the children of **Ellsworth Ioder**. When their dad was a lad, he bought that rocker for 25 cents at the hotel's fire sale.

Recently, in organizing materials to display in our museum, we came across two additional written accounts suggesting Lincoln's link to Tiskilwa. Back in 1975, when Tiskilwa's Bicentennial Committee sent out a plea for help with its planned celebration, former resident **Leslie Battey** (THS '16) answered the call by mailing numerous photo reprints, including one of the Hotel Utopia. On the reverse side of the photo, he had jotted this note: "Lincoln is said to have slept here on July 3, 1856, on his way to the Fourth of July speech at Princeton, Illinois."

Then a few weeks later, while thumbing through the **Tiskilwa History** (a compilation of reminiscences assembled by local historians in 1976-78), we chanced upon a remark by lifelong resident **Bill Vowels** that he'd heard that Lincoln once stayed at Tiskilwa's hotel before he became President.

The "wild hair" Abraham Lincoln photograph (*below*, attributed to **Masters Studio in Princeton, 1856) was said to have been taken following his Fourth of July speech in Princeton. One explanation for Abe's rock-star hair-do is that, after a hot July afternoon of lengthy speeches, Mr. Lincoln took a brisk walk from the Grove to the Masters studio, several blocks north. As you'll note, this photo of Lincoln at age 47 is an amazing contrast to portraits taken before his death at age 56 in 1865, only nine years later.**



It wasn't long before BCHS's Pam Lange discovered a second newspaper statement, this one printed in the *Bureau County Republican* on February 15, 1934. **Mrs. Forrest Steele** of Dover wrote a recollection of Lincoln's visit to Bureau County as told to her by her father, **J.W. Baker** of Tiskilwa.

*"My father heard Lincoln's speech in Bryant Woods when, as he related, all roads leading into Princeton were filled with horses and carriages as far as the eye could see. Upon this occasion, Mr. Lincoln arrived . . . at Tiskilwa, where he remained until morning at the village hotel, when he rode to Princeton in a "hack," a three-seated buggy which for many years made two trips a day to Princeton for the convenience of [train] passengers. The hack driver at this time was Captain Orin Wilkinson."*

Can you help us pull together a few more threads to continue stitching our crazy quilt of fact and hearsay? After all, just like every other little town in Illinois, Tiskilwa wants to be able to proclaim with confidence, "Lincoln Slept Here!"

**UPDATES FOR GALLERY ON GALENA AND MUSEUM ON MAIN**

***Behind the Scenes at Museum on Main***

We never know what is going to appear at our doorstep, and this summer was no exception. Two unusual gifts are pictured below. A 1890s portrait of **Charlie Blessing**, lifelong Tiskilwa resident as a young man. Another gift out of the blue was a gigantic Civil War cannonball, donated by **Brad Oeder**, Princeton. Our research indicates that this 10-inch model is likely a Rodman, among the largest in the U.S. arsenal, and designed for naval warfare.



*Left: Cousins **Kate Hewitt**, Bradford, and **Sandra Chiaravalle**, Hopewell, delivered this portrait of their great uncle, **Charlie Blessing** of Tiskilwa.*

*Right: Although our collection policy is to accept only those items with a direct connection to Tiskilwa, we made an exception for this cannonball, dug up from a fence row near LaMoille, given to Brad Oeder, who offered it to us. By the way, the photo enlargement behind the cannonball is from a (circa 1948) Veterans Day parade, and, yes, the yardstick is from **Hughes Hardware Store**.*

***Behind the Scenes at Gallery on Galena***

Although the fundraising, design, and effort were all spearheaded by **Sondra** and **Scott Owens**, our society's role was to give the go-ahead to install this three-ton boulder on our property, just north of the Gallery on Galena. Following the death of **Chuck Newstrand** (THS '81), a two-year effort began to commemorate his artwork depicting Chief Tiskilwa on the upper wall of Tiskilwa High School's gymnasium. The dedication ceremony was held on Sunday afternoon, August 8, 2021, with Deacon **John Murphy** (THS '66) giving the benediction.



**Wapsipinicon** Editors:

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***T-H-S "OLD TRADITIONS, NEW BEGINNINGS" Float Snags First Place at Annual TCA Pow Wow Parade***

We liked the sound of this year's parade theme right from the start. But . . . what could we put on our float to portray that theme? As all of us slowly pondered this enigma at our July 5 board meeting, **Bill Wendle** suddenly popped up with this idea: "Why not depict the transition from the old Legion Hall to the new Gallery on Galena?" Of course! That's it! We started right in, dividing up tasks and duties, and a month later, following the August board meeting, several of us put together the parts we'd been collecting, building, creating, and enlarging. Proud to say, it all came together into a first-place beauty of a beast.



**From the Department of Odd-but-True**

Over the years, we've all heard stories of many unusual, WHAAAT? connections to our little Tiskilwa. Some of them are coincidences and others are special accomplishments by Tiskilwa natives. Have you heard what we've heard? Email one of the editors with your brief story. Something like these . . .

**\*\*When childhood besties, Carla Shell and Nancy Lemonds** from the tiny Tennessee town of Ridgely, started chatting about their husbands-to-be, they soon realized that both fellows, **Dick Miller** and **Mike Hickey**, were originally from the tiny Illinois town of Tiskilwa.

**\*\*When riding in a Lyft in Chicago, Cele Gerber** decided to chat up the driver, who explained that his main business was selling medical instruments. Cele said she knew only one person in that business many years ago, and he used to live in a little town 125 miles from Chicago. The driver said, "Would that be **John Thompson**?" Well, yes, it would. He continued, "Yeah, I've been to that little town." Admittedly, he could not recall the name of our village. Forgiven.

**\*\*"HOMETOWN BOY MAKES GOOD, TO HEAD NTL. BALL LEAGUE"** – That was the big, bold the headline of the *Bureau Valley Chief* on October 5, 1951. The story is about **Warren Giles**, born in Tiskilwa in 1896, who served as President of the National League, retiring in 1969. He died at age 83 in 1979, a few weeks before he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Although Warren's family moved to the Quad Cities when he was a boy, Warren often returned to Tiskilwa to toss the ball around with some of his childhood buddies.



## Looking to the Past: Maggie's Cottage Hotel

With the fairly recent arrival of a Bed & Breakfast as well as an Airbnb in Tiskilwa, it reminded us of the adage, "Everything old is new again." This photo, sent to us last November by **Davis Battey** (THS '65), seems to be printed from one of his **Aunt Zilpha Battey's** slides in the 1950s. "Maggie's Hotel" on the right later belonged to **Lud Morris**, before the church purchased it.



A memory from Davis: *Before my father married my mother in 1945, he was very involved in local boards at various times throughout his 50-year bachelorhood. Everything from school board, church boards, Bureau County Housing board, and Selective Service board. Consequently, he seldom took meals at home. Besides the cafes and Bernie's Tap, he enjoyed dinner served at local boarding houses, including Mrs. McMahon's. I was told by my mother that the Bornsheuer house on the west hill above the village (where the water storage tank is located) was also a boarding house at one time, and my father sometimes took meals there. The house was accessed by a lane at the bottom of Lusty Hill.*

Wanna know more? Grab your little green copy of "When Tiskilwa Was Young" by **Mary B. Steimle** (THS '22) and turn to page 39 to read additional details about Maggie McMahon's Cottage Hotel. According to lifelong resident Mary, "Maggie's Place was known to commercial travelers from coast to coast for its bountiful meals and wonderful cuisine."

Editor's note: Were you picturing the opening scene from *Music Man* as you read "commercial travelers from coast to coast"?

## History Mystery for September



*These Tiskilwa twins will be 97 years old on November 24<sup>th</sup> this year. The two little Hanson girls grew up on a farm near Manlius, but as adults they both made their homes with their husbands near Tiskilwa. The little girl on the left told us that, just before the photo was taken, she'd gotten in a bit of trouble for lopping off a big*

*hunk of her straight-as-a-string bangs. After all, her sister had all those curls!*

**Can you name them – and recognize who's who?**

**History Mystery Solved.** Most Tiskilwa residents will recognize **Genevieve Cummins** (left) and **Geraldine Pruitt** as the sisters standing at the edge their mother's flower garden. Genevieve married **Lester Cummins**; Geri married **Floyd Pruitt**. For the past several years, both sisters have made their homes in our village and been active in Tiskilwa Community Church and our historical society.

### Family of Keith Miller Donates Memorial Bench

Following a July 24 Celebration of Life in memory of **Keith Miller** (THS '69), his family and friends gathered in a shady spot under three birch trees in the corner of the west lawn of Museum on Main. Over the years, we have hosted several memorial services for people who grew up in the Methodist Church, the building that now houses our museum.



As we discussed with Keith's widow, Teri, (*seated at right*) our plan is to expand the nearby oval garden to include the bench area. The stand of birches was donated years ago in memory of **Doug Anderson** (THS '66) by his family. If you'd like to help with planning a landscape design this fall, please let us know.

### Collector's Corner of All Things Tisk

**Suggested donations:** T-shirt \$15 (navy or gray); Long-sleeved gray shirt \$20; Directory \$15; DVDs = \$10 each (Plus postage)

**ALUMNI DIRECTORY:** It's quite handy to own this 2009 booklet since it has a listing of all THS graduates (1878-1995). In addition, it has a photo history of Tiskilwa's schools and the Tiskilwa Alumni Association.

**TISKILWA T-SHIRT** in navy or gray, as modeled (right) by our museum mascot, Lance. Shirts available in varied sizes, including Youth. However, if we don't have the special size that you want, we'll put it on our next order.



### How you can help:

1. We're thinking there might be a **school bell** somewhere out there looking for a happy home by (or in) our Gallery on Galena. We'd love to display an old country school bell, especially from one of the fifteen schools highlighted in the Gallery. If you're willing to share yours with the community, just get in touch with someone on the board.
2. "Little things mean a lot . . ." If you're shopping on Amazon, you can help our society by using [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). It's easy! As you begin your purchase at the above site (rather than going to Amazon.com), you are prompted to click on the name of the charity of your choice. (**Hint: Tiskilwa Historical Society**) But don't worry. Even if a different favorite charity is already designated for your "Smiles" buys, it's easy to click to our name for a single purchase and then click back next time.

**COMING SOON to a Museum (on Main) near you:**

**Sunday, September 5, ON THE LAWN at 3 pm:** Fiddle music

**Monday, October 11 at 7 pm:** Everett Dirksen program

**Monday, November 8 at 7 pm:** A visit from Chief Black Hawk

## TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*THS Class of '81 gathered at the new Chief Tiskilwa Rock on August 8 to honor the memory of classmate **Chuck Newstrand**. (See story p. 4)*

*Front from left: **Mitzi Roberts Spainhour, Christy Wagner Senneff***

*Second row: **Mary Jo Kunkel Gustafson, Benita Cotter Klasen, Tracy Joiner Nally, Becky Brokaw Lorenzen***

*Back row: **Todd Gustafson, Buzz Gustafson, Al Warren, Barry Dugosh, Ben Philhower***

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